

and hospital that had used it's guest rooms and comforts for the recovery of hundreds of war casualties, and gained distinction for it's great service during the war.

It reminded me of the war veterans song, "Good soldiers never die, they simply fade away". This time it was a house, and a once beautiful woman who still was living in it's shadow.

They too, simply fade away'.

I was also fond of the Old London Hospital. Decorum was still in vogue. On reporting to the Matron, it was always the same routine. "Good Morning Mam, this is Elizabeth Pitt reporting for duty". You were then assigned to a ward, usually named after the ward benifactor. Mine was ward "Sophia", where the head nurse was called Sister Sophia. Sophia was the name of the Duchess of Devonshire in this case, and I recalled that she had been the wife of the former Governor General of Canada, and the Mother of Princess Patricia who was well known to the Canadian forces in world war one, as a regiment was given her name, and referred to as the "Princess Pats".

Our various duties included ironing bed curtains by seesawing them over the warming ovens, bathing patients, serving meals, and general nursing. It was difficult to remember that "Drs." were called "Mr.", and surgeons called "Doctor". One only spoke to them, if you were spoken to first. Just to surprise them, I would often say "Good-morning Sir", and they never failed to smile and answer when they saw my Canada badge. I thought it good public relations for my country.

I always enjoyed my ride on the red double-decker bus as I made my



way to the hospital. I developed the proper leap to land on their back platform, as it started to slowly move ahead. The woman conductor smiled as she saw my Canada badge and commented on my agility.

On this particular morning she was not smiling and as the fare bell rang in her box, she asked if I was on my way to the "Old London". My affirmative answer brought a concerned look to her face. "You'll get a surprise to-day", she said, "It got a direct hit last night and two nurses and two patients were killed." This shattered me for a moment but I was shortly off the bus, and making my way to the Matron's office to report for duty as usual.

There, I received my second shocker. Her desk was still covered with dust and debris. Pieces of plaster and lath hung perilously from the ceiling, from which small streams of water dropped to the pails below, placed in the precise area to receive the drips from above. The door was off, and leaning carefully against the wall as though the doodle-bug bombs knew exactly where to place everything. Glass blown out of the windows formed a fine sugar coating on the furniture and books which defied removal without wearing protective gloves.

Ward Sophia was a mess. Two patients were killed at the far end of the ward when the water tanks had fallen through from the floor above. How strange that a young lad had given his bed there to an elderly man who complained of a window draft. This saved the young patient's life. The two nurses killed just happened to be crossing the garden courtyard to take a short-cut, and the matron, out of the office while making her "rounds", escaped. Fate worked in many strange ways.



I was sent out immediately on the converted bus ambulance as we evacuated patients from the damaged area of the hospital. There were eight stretcher cases in each ambulance with available needs for all passengers. It was found that a good cup of tea could provide as much help as a medication.

We drove through unmarked towns and villages, to arrive at our hospital's unknown destination. It was only while returning to London that the driver gave me some idea where we had been.

There were still two more days working at the Old London, cleaning out cabinets and cupboards, to remove broken solution bottles and bits and pieces of shattered glass and equipment. We were more than thankful for our special gloves. The doodle-bug fly bombs continued to arrive at five minute intervals. Their droning became louder as they approached. It was as disturbing as a bumble-bee in your garden. If it got too close and the noise ceased, you knew it would land, so could dive under the nearest sturdy table with a surprising dignity, and following the blast, which could shoot the curtains out at right angles to the window, it became a signal to return to your immediate task with a nonchalance that belied your concern of the past few minutes.

You realized these pilotless monsters had been aimed at the docks in the Thames nearby, and were able to dodge the high aim of the air raid protection guns by flying in extremely low.

The Air Force then developed a method of flying underneath them to tip their wings, which forced them to the ground before they could reach



their target in London.

While my duty in the hospital soon ended, I left with a feeling of great admiration for the nurses and staff of the hospital who gallantly carried on through the duration of the war.

The Old London Hospital had been looked on with great reverence by the people of London. She had defied the blitz, and fly bombs on many occasions, shattered a bit at times, but stubbornly survived. No wonder she was known as the "Grand Old Lady of London".

It was during my special tour of duty, that I was to find out what was expected of our Canadian St. John Ambulance nurses when serving overseas, and was my reason for working in Medical Aid posts, First Aid Posts, English Hospitals, and Convalescence Hospitals. This caused me to think of Tait on many occasions, and the terrific contribution he had made in World War One. He had first volunteered his services in the Medical Corps of the British Army before the United States joined the forces. He was sent on a special medical course and found that the text books he was given, had been written by himself. This prompted the British to have him receive an immediate commission and made a head medical officer at the Manchester Hospital. There, his text book "Reclaiming the Maimed" was used extensively, and led finally to physiotherapy through his knowledge of exercise, anatomy and kinesiology.

The oil painting portrait, which once was in his Philadelphia dining-room, still shows him in his Major's Uniform and is hung in the Mississippi Valley Conservation <sup>Authority</sup> ~~Society~~ McKenzie Museum, at the Mill of Kintail at Almonte, Ontario.



CHAPTER   SIX

When thinking of his future retirement, Tait longed to return to the Almonte area, where he was born and spent his boyhood. He carefully scoured the countryside, and discovered the very spot of his dreams. Not far from Ottawa, yet sufficiently isolated to pursue his work with a minimum of disturbance.

It was a rugged stone grist mill, over a hundred years old, and showed it's age with tangled vines eating the cement that held the hammered field stone to-gether. Located on the Indian River, the stream ran into the Mississippi, eventually to be a small part of the great Ottawa River. The mill's high loft would provide an ideal studio, lots of space, and with an added skylight, house his massive figures perfectly. Sturdy beams and flooring had been strong enough to support tons of grain for a dozen decades. A stationary drawbridge looked useable, but was held in place by heavy chains with over-sized links. Large cast iron carriage lamps must have created weird dancing shadows on the hand-hewn stone in the stark blackness of night.

Tait was truly thrilled with his find and lost no time in securing the building and a fine tract of land to protect it. Ethel was much less exuberant as she thought of the isolation, the lack of electricity, and most of all, no telephone. However, she always had her music, and when her grand piano arrived, took consolation in her classics that often seemed to harmonize with the rippling sounds of the waters rushing by her window.

The furnishings chosen were of early Canadian design. There was a four-poster bed with a frilled canopy top, while others still had the underneath ropes to hold the mattress in place. The living room furniture was



mostly handmade, but with few pieces one could achieve relaxation for a snooze. The walls were sturdy and of great depth. One could sit on a window sill, and enjoy a quiet game of solitaire, or it could provide the space for the huge flower arrangements that Ethel loved to make with loving care and a master hand. Eventually a bathroom was installed, and controlled by a temperamental gas engine. Hallway doors mysteriously opened and closed, depending on the whim of the breeze which softly whistled through the passage. The front door was huge and wrinkled with age. The door key was enormous and the keyhole required could provide an extensive view through the interior to include the trees on the other side of the stream. Also to be seen, on a tiny desk-shelf, was the original long narrow mill-ledger, which listed all deals, trades and transactions made, with their payments in money or spirits. Just to the left of the draw-bridge, Tait had placed a sundial which he had designed to catch the morning and afternoon sunshine, by attaching it to the corner of the building on both sides. As the sun's shadow crept slowly by, it was always accurate, although it would never change to fast time.

Tait was community minded, and the children from nearby Almonte were invited to swim in the pond he built by erecting a stone dam across the river. One could walk across the pathway on top of the terraced structure to a wooded area on the other side. Here a tree house was built for Ethel, where she could enjoy quiet solitude to write her beloved poems which were later published in book form. When entertaining V.I.P's at the Mill, it was a McKenzie custom to have Madrigal singers strolling through this woodland area. Their voices came softly across the river, and their costumes added colour to the unusual scene presented.



The Mill became known as "The Mill of Kintail". It was named after the Highlands inhabited by the McKenzies, and to honour Tait's ancestry. He grew to love the place dearly, and he and Ethel spent many happy summers there. Here, he found peace of mind, strength and the inspiration that carried him on through the strenuous winter pace of his life in Philadelphia.



## C H A P T E R    S E V E N

Tait's work prospered. He became recognized abroad, in the United States and in Canada. The clay figures seemed to come to life under the creative touch of his thumb, fingers, and the deft stroke of his sculptor's tool. R.T.M. was now a famous and recognized signature. His medallions were prolific, and his monument figures spectacular.

It was tragic that he was unable to continue his work at the height of his successful career, and retire as planned to his studio at the Mill of Kintail.

Circumstances intervened in a strange way.

Fate is sometimes not at all understandable, often cruel, and in many cases strikes a crushing blow without due warning. The shock tremors can be unbelievable.

Thus it happened in 1938 when Tait's life was suddenly terminated at his home in Philadelphia. It had been his custom to run up the curved stairway speedily, explaining that it was a great time saver and helped fulfill his exercise needs. Besides, he had done it for years. That could have been quite true, but the day came when it proved to be disastrous. He dropped on the stair landing. Able to call to his wife nearby, he died in her arms before a Doctor could reach him.

A stunned art world was appalled by his sudden passing.

His home and studio were left bare of his loving care and creativity.

Ethel was distraught, and facing a changed world.

A beloved and famous personality had passed on, but the inspirational influence and power which permeated his clay figures, was to continue



through the years to come.

There remained the Mill of Kintail as well. Tait's scalpel lay where he had last used it. Sketches and ideas made in pencil, grew dim as they faced the beams of the high ceiling above. Thus neglected, the studio gathered dust and spider webs as the years started to slowly creep by.

Ethel thought she might find solace, in returning to the Mill. She picked up a young couple as staff, and started on her long journey from Philadelphia to Almonte.

Upon arrival, it was noticed that the entrance gate and handcarved Mill-sign was in disrepair. Weeds grown to great height clogged the winding road. Cedars on each side seemed to join hands above to form a tunnel through which she slowly progressed. The Mill itself looked desolate. Vines covered the old stone building and hid the shutters, preventing any light from seeping through. It at once gave her the impression of the Castle, where the princess had slept for a hundred years.

After tedious clean-ups, the sunshine brightened the Mill during the day, but it was a different story at night. As darkness enclosed her, it grew damp and eerie. Shadows seemed to reach for her, as the swaying tree branches scraped on her window pane. A whip-poor-will's wailing whistle crashed the solitude, but did not add to the peace and comfort she had hoped to find there.

It was only a short time until her staff retreated from her lonely world, and left her devastated, far from a main road. Fortunately she could contact a farmer nearby and leave at once, to return to her familiar surroundings in Philadelphia.



I then received a heart shattering letter from her. If only she and Tait had had a family, and would I not consider moving to Philadelphia where I could share a social life with her. No one seemed to care, now that Tait was gone, and she was so alone. It was indeed a sad situation, but an impossibility for me to accept.

At that time I was holding a top YWCA job as Executive Director of the Oshawa Association, and had bought a new home, preparing for my retirement, and expecting my Mother to spend her older years with me. It was difficult to reject Ethel's letter, but I also knew Ethel was known for her firey temperament, eccentricity and high emotional tidal waves. I could not afford to take the chances, which might find me swept out at a moment's notice.

Only a part brindle bull-dog, picked up at the pound, and a stray tabby-cat, became Ethel's constant guard and companion. However, these little creatures could not attend the Philadelphia Orchestra concerts, nor belong to her exclusive Clubs.

During my brief visits, she loved to attend the theatre, and "eat out" in many fascinating places, but it did not lure me from my home responsibilities. She finally came to realize that her social life following her famous husband's death had slowly diminished, without the broad circle of his friends.

The Mill of Kintail seemed to be on my mind continuously. I thought of the possibility of making it into a Canadian Folk School, similar to the one I had attended in Denmark. It could foster Tait's love for Physical and Health Education. However my family took a dim view of the suggested project, as they objected to the isolated area, too many repairs and poor plumbing and water facilities. No electricity and still no phone were





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